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HUNGER COUNTIES 1986

The Distribution of America's High-Risk Areas

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Physician Task Force on Hunger in America

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Statement of Purpose

This report identifies the 150 worst "hunger counties" in America-- counties where large numbers of citizens experience hunger and high risk of nutritional deprivation.

Hunger counties are defined by the existence of two factors: more than 20% of the county residents live on incomes below the federal poverty level, and fewer than one-third of eligible needy residents receive the benefits of the federal food stamp program.

This analysis is part of the continuing work of the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America to identify and assess the nature and scope of domestic hunger, and to help enlighten the public and policymakers as to its causes and solutions. The identification of hunger counties stems directly from research and field investigations conducted by the Task Force in 1983 and 1984.

Last year we reported that some 20,000,000 Americans experience hunger. That study (Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic, Wesleyan University Press, 1985) was based on extensive research and field study conducted by physicians and other health professionals. The extent of hunger documented-- and the degree of deprivation we saw firsthand-- raised a serious question: Why is the federal food stamp program, the single most important weapon in the nation's fight against hunger, failing to reach so many of the people for whom it is intended?

To help answer this question, and to identify the areas of greatest need, we have located the worst hunger counties in the nation. The hunger county concept has been utilized previously, the first time in 1968 by a team of prominent physicians and religious leaders under the auspices of the Field Foundation. The idea was used again in 1973 by a Select Committee of the United States Senate under the bipartisan leadership of Senators George McGovern and Robert Dole.

The criteria we have employed to identify hunger counties, and the purposes for which we have done so, closely parallel these previous undertakings. We have undertaken this most recent effort for several reasons:

1) To document the distribution of counties with the worst poverty and poorest food stamp participation in the United States;

2) To quantify the "hunger gap" among counties by comparing need to actual food stamp assistance provided for the nation's poorest families; and

3) To establish a basis for analyzing barriers to more effective utilization of this key food assistance program.

This report will serve as the basis for subsequent research and field investigations by the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America. As in the past, we will report our findings to Congress and the American public in order to promote greater understanding aboutthe epidemic of hunger in America.

Introduction

In 1968, the Citizens' Board of Inquiry into Hunger and Malnutrition in the United States reported that hunger in the nation was a serious problem affecting millions of people. This group of doctors and other prominent citizens identified 280 "hunger counties" in the nation, counties where poverty and infant mortality were high, and federal food assistance was low.

The hunger counties represented conditions of extreme need rather than exceptions, for hunger was widespread in the nation and food assistance programs were inadequate. But this latter condition was to change.

National attention to hunger in America led to expansion and standardization of federal food programs. Moreover, the identification of hunger counties provided an impetus for many state and local officials to improve efforts to assist the poor. Within a span of several years family food program participation in the United States increased greatly.

By 1972, Department of Agriculture Assistant Secretary Richard Lyng, the person responsible for many federal food programs, declared that the job of feeding the hungry of this nation was "substantially completed... The /hunger/ gap is closed..." Mr. Lyng expressed his belief that virtually every low-income family had access to food assistance and that "there is little excuse today for any family in the United States to be without the resources for sufficient food."[1]

Yet, despite program improvements, many families remained without adequate food. In 1973, the United States Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Need updated the 1968 analysis of hunger counties in America. Identifying counties in which poverty was high (over 25% of the population), and food assistance low (less than 33% of the eligible poor receiving help), the Select Committee documented 263 hunger counties in the nation.

While some progress had been made since 1968, it was premature for the Assistant Secretary to maintain that the "hunger gap" was closed in 1972. America still had more to do to end hunger and, in fact, further progress was made. Program expansion in the next few years made food available to more impoverished citizens.

In 1977, a panel of physicians, commissioned by the national Field Foundation, returned to regions of the nation where serious hunger and malnutrition had been identified several years before. They reported that while poverty still existed, they no longer saw widespread hunger and clinical malnutrition. The federal food programs were by then providing a critical margin of difference for the poor of the nation. While it was not completely eliminated, hunger had diminished as a widespread problem.

By 1980-81, many signs pointed to the re-emergence of hunger in this country. Across the nation churches and other community institutions were compelled to respond to growing numbers of families who were without adequate food to eat. Bread lines and soup kitchens began to appear across the land.

Between 1982-1985, some fifteen national studies concluded that hunger was again a serious problem. This conclusion was reached by entities as diverse as government agencies, national religious organizations, policy groups and university researchers.

Less than a year ago the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America reported to Congress and the nation that hunger in this country constitutes a national health epidemic.[2] At least 20,000,000 citizens suffer from hunger at least some days each month, and evidence points to a worsening situation.

Not only is hunger increasing as a problem, but federal food programs designed to feed the hungry have been weakened. In 1981, the federal government initiated changes in these programs in order to target them to the "truly needy." The theory was that by cutting services to the near-poor, the most destitute would be more adequately served. It was hoped that this improvement would be true particularly for food stamps, the nation's major food assistance effort.

As of 1985, however, participation by the poor in the food stamp program had declined rather than increased. The rate of coverage of people below poverty fell from sixty-five of every hundred (65/100) in 1980, to 55/100 in 1984. The better targeting of assistance that had been envisioned was not taking place.

In October, 1985, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Robert E. Leard, told a Congressional Committee that the food stamp program was operating at an optimal level. Like his counterpart Richard Lyng several years before, Mr. Leard maintained that there is "not much

room for improvement" in the federal food stamp program. Mr. Leard said he believes the program "is just fine the way it is." [3]

Evidence suggests, however, that the food stamp program is not fine the way it is. Designed to prevent hunger in the nation, the food stamp program serves just over half the poorest citizens for whom its benefits are intended. This decline in the rate of coverage is taking place as hunger is getting worse.

We face the paradox, then, that as hunger increases food stamp coverage is going down. To try to understand this paradox we decided to look again at the hunger counties of America as did our predecessors in 1968 and 1973.

The Relationship of Hunger and Poverty

As a matter of federal policy poverty and hunger are directly linked. The criteria employed to identify hunger counties in America is based on this fundamental relationship.

The poverty level in the United States is determined by a statistical index devised in the mid-1960's. The nation's official poverty level is based on two measures: the proportion of income that poor families are expected to spend for food, and the estimated cost of a minimally adequate diet. The U.S. Department of Agriculture determined that poor families spend about one-third of their incomes on food. Based on this determination the government annually sets the federal poverty level at three times the cost of a minimally adequate diet (known as the Thrifty Food Plan).

The government defines as poor any family with an annual income less than three times the cost of this minimal diet. To live in poverty, then, is by definition to be unable to afford adequate nutrition.

Poverty in America has increased sharply since 1979. In 1983 and 1984 (the most recent years for which data is available), more Americans lived in poverty than at any time in the past two decades. In 1979, 29.4 million citizens lived in poverty. By 1983, five million more joined their ranks. By 1984, despite a slight drop in the rate of poverty (14.4%), some 33.7 million Americans lived in poverty.

TABLE I

Poverty Trends in the United States

Year	# People in Poverty (millions)	% Population in Poverty
1965	33.2	17.3
1966	28.5	14.7
1967	27.8	14.2
1968	25.4	12.8
1969	24.3	12.2
1970	25.4	12.6
1971	25.6	12.5
1972	24.5	11.9
1973	22.9	11.1
1974	23.4	11.2
1975	25.9	12.3
1976	24.9	11.8
1977	24.7	11.6
1978	24.5	11.4
1979	26.1	11.7
1980	29.3	13.0
1981	31.8	14.0
1982	34.4	15.0
1983	35.3	15.2
1984	33.7	14.4

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Characteristics of Population Below the Poverty Level: 1983"; and "Money, Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons, advanced reports, 1984."

The government annually adjusts for poverty, based on the Consumer Price Index. As of 1984, the poverty level for a family of four was $10,609. During that same year, by contrast, the median family income was $26,430.

While the federal poverty level has proved to be a useful statistical index, it has two major flaws. It seriously underestimates real need, and it fails to account for variability.

The Thrifty Food Plan, upon which the poverty level is based, was never determined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide an adequate diet. Rather, a federal food stamp expenditure level was established, and a computer programmed to design a food plan equal to that predetermined level. At the time the Thrifty Food Plan was designed, USDA nutritionists warned that it was not adequate over longer periods of time. The Plan was adopted in 1975, and has been used as the norm ever since.

Food stamps, whose normal allotment is .49¢ per person per meal, also fail to account for the variability of the real world. It assumes that all poor families have adequate storage, refrigeration and transportation to appropriately-priced markets. The Thrifty Food Plan allows for few meats, a lot of starches, strictly-measured amounts of milk for growing children, and absolutely nothing considered non-essential (such as birthday cakes or snacks). The hypothetical standards of the Plan are inadequate and unrealistic for a large proportion of families, including those who:

* live in areas with high food prices
* live in states that tax food purchases
* have no direct means of transportation to markets
* have teenage children or other family members who either eat more or require special diets due to chronic illness
* have pregnant mothers whose dietary requirements are greater while carrying their babies

In this context, it is not difficult to understand why USDA nutritionists consider the assumptions underlying the Thrifty Food Plan to be flawed. And because the Plan serves as the government's basis for determining poverty, the federal poverty level itself is flawed.

Yet another misconception underlies the perception of poverty in America. This is the misconception that the federal poverty level represents an income floor-- a level below which no individual or family is allowed to fall. In fact the poverty population is distributed across a range of poverty-level incomes, from close to the poverty level, on the one hand, to almost no income at all, on the other. In other words, the average impoverished family of four does not live on $10,609 per year, but substantially below that level. Thus the official poverty level is not a floor, but a ceiling.

In no state in the nation do poor families receiving both food stamps and AFDC even come up to the poverty level. As can be seen in Appendix D, Alaska is the most generous state for these two programs. The typical family receiving both food stamps and AFDC in Alaska lives at only 89% of poverty. In Wyoming and Kansas, which rank in the middle, such poor families live at 69% of poverty. In Alabama the typical poor family lives at less than50% of the poverty level.

Hunger and Food Stamps

The food stamp program played a central role in the elimination of hunger in America during the 1970's. Today some critics charge that the program is fraught with waste and abuse, although the evidence does not support these allegations.[4] Rather than succumb to such charges, we find it more useful to acknowledge the important contribution of the food stamp program, and then hold it to high standards of effectiveness. Within this context we must ask why more poor people who are in need of food stamps fail to receive them.

In the previous section we noted some of the flaws in the Thrifty Food Plan, the theoretical model upon which the federal poverty level is based. The fundamental flaw in the food stamp program is that it, like the definition of poverty, is directly based on the Thrifty Food Plan. Families receive only enough food stamps to bring their food-purchasing resources up to the level of the Thrifty Food Plan. Since the Plan is inadequate the food stamp program itself is inadequate. USDA's most recent Household Food Consumption Survey, for example, reveals that over 80% of all households whose food expenditures equal the Thrifty Food Plan fail to obtain the recommended dietary intake for nutrients. Other evidence also supports this finding.

Despite this serious flaw, food stamps still represent the most important food assistance program in the United States. So, for the purpose of this analysis, we will overlook the inadequacies of the program and consider it adequate. In identifying the worst 150 hunger counties in the nation we designate only those where poverty is highest and food stamp participation the lowest. By constructing the analysis in this manner the outcome will be unduly conservative. By establishing the cutoff of the worst 150 counties (which represent approximately 5% of all counties in the nation), we will be overlooking impoverishment and poor nutritional intake in many other areas of the country.

Hunger County Methodology and Limitations

To identify hunger counties in the United States we have employed two measures: poverty and food stamp participation. We have constructed an index based on the definition that a county is a hunger county if it has both high poverty and low food stamp participation.High poverty exists when more than 20% of the county population is poor. At this threshold a county has a poverty rate 150% above the national level.

We define low food stamp participation as it was defined by the Senate Select Committee in 1973. Any county in which fewer than 33% of the eligible poor receive food stamps is a low participation county.

Far more than 150 counties would be hunger counties had we not decided to establish that number as the cut-off for this analysis. The 150 limit was selected because we sought to identify the worst hunger counties in the nation, and 150 represents approximately 5% of all counties in the nation. This small proportion, we believe, must be considered the extreme insofar as hunger in the country.

For the purposes of this analysis, poverty data were obtained from the 1980 Decennial Census, and were updated as of 1984 by a factor derived from Census Bureau data. Food stamp participation data are as of July, 1984, and were obtained from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Appendix A describes the methodology in greater detail.

The Decennial Census is a valuable tool both because of the broad national picture and the specific trends it reflects. Not only does it show the distribution of the population by categories such as income, race, age and employment, but it can be used to localize national information to determine ways in which characteristics of the population are changing.

Census data is collected and analyzed at the level of the census tract, and is revealing and useful at this basic level. Food stamp participation, however, is not available by census tract, so for the purposes of this analysis we have gone to the county level. The county level is useful for the analysis of hunger, both because counties are relatively small geographic units, and because both income (poverty) and food stamp data are available at this level.

County census data does have a serious drawback, however, when used to reflect income distribution. It disproportionately reflects the situation in some states. This is because county lines are drawn to serve administrative ends rather than on the basis of population units. Because the division of states into counties is varied, some states in particular regions of the nation have a lot of counties and others have relatively few.

California, for example, has well over 20 million residents but only 58 counties. Georgia, on the other hand, has approximately 5 million residents, but 159 counties-- the second largest number

of counties in any state. As a consequence of this the poor in the sparsely-populated counties of Georgia will be appropriately reflected in county income averages for that state. But dividing the population of California into just 58 counties underrepresents the poor because they are mixed in among larger population groups whose higher incomes obscure the incidence of poverty in that state.

The use of county data, therefore, has the effect of somewhat inaccurately characterizing poverty in America as a phenomenon in states where county lines reflect small county population units.[5] Despite this limitation, a county-by-county breakdown offers an important way to analyze poverty and hunger in the nation. Moreover, the historic utilization of the hunger county concept makes it a desirable approach for comparative purposes. Since the concept was first used by the physicians in 1968, and again by the Senate Select Committee in 1973, it is useful to employ it today to document and analyze the distribution of hunger throughout the nation.

Characteristics of 1986 Hunger Counties

Identifying the worst 150 hunger counties in the nation yields several interesting points with respect to their distribution:

** Hunger counties exist in 24 states of the United States. This means that half the states in the country have one or more counties in which economic deprivation is so high and food assistance so low that large numbers of residents face nutritional deprivation.

** Another striking feature of the distribution of hunger counties is their high concentration in the Midwest and North Central regions of the nation. In 1973, and particularly 1968, the distribution of hunger counties was centered largely in the South and Southwest. Today, these regions have been joined by states in America's breadbasket and plains: Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, Illinois, Arkansas, South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Idaho and Montana.

** It is apparent that three states contain an unusually high proportion of the country's 150 worst hunger counties. Leading the list of hunger county states are Texas (29), South Dakota (28), and Missouri (17). Altogether these states contain about half of all hunger counties in the nation.

TABLE II

Number of Hunger Counties by State

1986

State	Number of Hunger Counties	Total Counties
Alabama	1	67
Arizona	2	10
Arkansas	6	75
Colorado	2	63
Florida	4	64
Georgia	5	159
Idaho	3	39
Illinois	1	102
Iowa	2	99
Missouri	17	115
Minnesota	5	85
Montana	7	41
Nebraska	10	93
North Carolina	5	100
North Dakota	11	43
Nevada	1	17
New Mexico	5	32
Oklahoma	1	77
South Dakota	28	47
Tennessee	1	95
Texas	29	254
Utah	1	29
Virginia	2	133
West Virginia	1	55

** High poverty is not the cause of low food stamp coverage in a state or county. It does not follow that if a state has a lot of poverty it will have more hunger counties. Mississippi, for example, one of the poorest states in the nation, has no hunger counties today. While poverty and deprivation are high, and while hunger clearly is a problem in that state, its counties do a better-than-average job of enrolling needy residents in the food stamp program. Yet Texas, a state with a much higher per capita income, has 29 hunger counties. Other states which rank higher on per capita income also have hunger counties: Minnesota, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, and Illinois.

** This analysis indicates that our nation has lost significant ground in its battle to end domestic hunger. For reasons previously outlined, we used criteria to find the worst 150 hunger counties in America. However, had we not used that cut-off point, and had we used food stamp eligibility criteria similar to that used in the 1968 and 1973 analyses, the number of hunger counties in the nation today has actually increased (see Appendix B). According to this standard the United States has regressed in its commitment to see that its people are adequately fed.[6]

While we can be quite certain that in hunger counties poor residents are at high nutritional risk, it cannot be concluded that hunger does not exist in counties which are not among the 150 on the list. We essentially are measuring how well the poorest counties of the nation utilize the food stamp program to feed their needy residents. But as indicated earlier, those states with large counties may "mask" the numbers of poor residents within them, thus avoiding identification by the standards we have used. Moreover, the decision to limit the list to 150 counties itself is artificially conservative, and serves to undercount the actual number of hunger counties in the nation.

To underscore this point consider applying our criteria of program participation to other federal programs. No high-poverty county is on our list if over one-third of its residents receive food stamps. But our nation probably would not accept a social security program in which only one-third of eligible older Americans received benefits. Nor would we think the Internal Revenue Service was doing its job were it to pay only one-third of the refunds it owes to taxpayers each year.

We point to the conservative nature of the measure we have employed lest we inadvertently imply that there is not serious deprivation in counties and states not on this list. Clearly there is. Rather, the usefulness of our index is to document the distribution of extreme deprivation across America for subsequent analysis of why more needy families are not covered by the food stamp program.

Footnotes

1. U.S. Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, Part 3B, hearing of June 22, 1972, p. 660.

2. Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic, Physician Task Force on Hunger in America, Harvard University School of Public Health, Wesleyan University Press, 1985.

3. Testimony before House Select Committee on Hunger, October 26, 1985, in New York Times, October 27, 1985.

4. Recent government studies, for example, indicate that the food stamp program has a low margin of error, probably much lower than that for Defense Department contracts and programs. For further information see Hunger in America, op. cit, Chapters Five and Six.

5. Other potential weaknesses of the method of analysis employed herein are discussed in Appendix A.

6. For further analysis and discussion of this comparison, see Appendices A and B.

TABLE III

Map of States with Hunger Counties

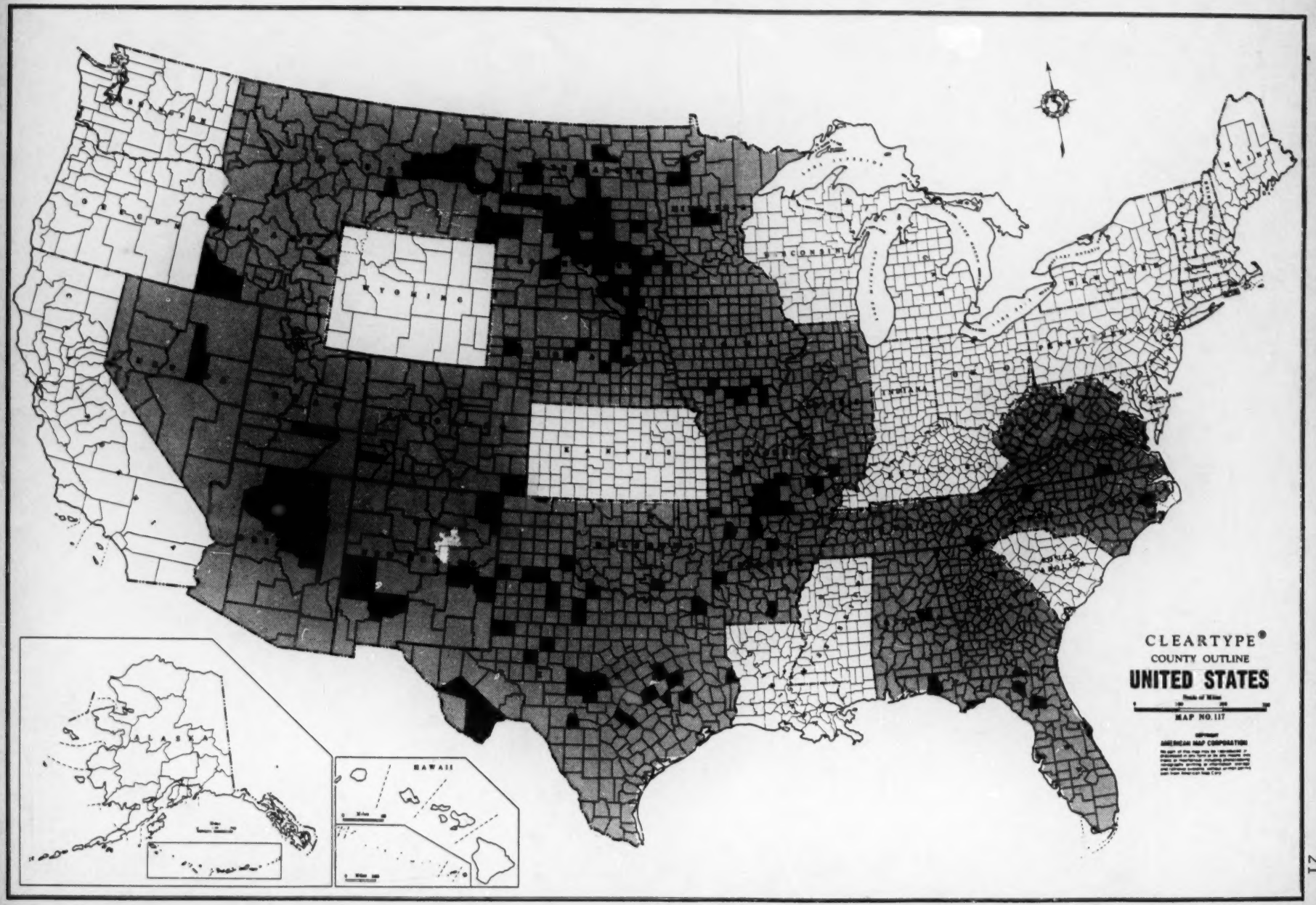

TABLE IV

LISTING OF HUNGER COUNTIES - 1986

STATE/COUNTY	PCT 1980 POP. BELOW POVERTY	PCT 1984 NEEDY ON FOOD STAMPS	NAT'L HUNGER COUNTY RANK
ALABAMA			
COOSA	24.68%	29.89%	129
ARKANSAS			
CLEBURNE	20.14%	26.49%	108
BRADLEY	26.24%	27.53%	115
MADISON	21.18%	29.77%	128
POLK	22.98%	30.20%	133
SEARCY	30.60%	31.30%	142
MARION	23.46%	31.95%	148
ARIZONA			
NAVAJO	29.66%	26.78%	111
COCONINO	20.37%	30.97%	137
COLORADO			
BACA	20.63%	10.65%	37
DOLORES	22.74%	18.48%	65
FLORIDA			
ALACHUA	23.55%	24.87%	97
SUWANNEE	23.91%	26.67%	109
WALTON	22.61%	30.01%	130
FRANKLIN	28.25%	31.72%	145
GEORGIA			
TOWNS	22.66%	21.49%	76
UNION	26.17%	22.88%	83
GLASCOCK	20.73%	27.54%	117
ECHOLS	25.60%	30.95%	136
CLARKE	20.67%	31.99%	149
IDAHO			
MADISON	27.52%	4.17%	5
OWYHEE	28.01%	25.01%	99
WASHINGTON	20.14%	27.84%	120
ILLINOIS			
JACKSON	22.33%	25.04%	100
IOWA			
RINGGOLD	24.74%	18.62%	66
DAVIS	22.03%	24.03%	90

STATE/COUNTY	PCT 1980 POP. BELOW POVERTY	PCT 1984 NEEDY ON FOOD STAMPS	NAT'L HUNGER COUNTY RANK
MINNESOTA			
LINCOLN	22.06%	13.57%	48
TODD	20.92%	21.61%	77
MORRISON	20.51%	25.69%	105
MAHNOMEN	23.97%	26.30%	107
CLEARWATER	22.13%	31.24%	140
MISSOURI			
PUTNAM	20.85%	14.58%	51
MERCER	20.14%	17.29%	58
SCOTLAND	20.26%	17.33%	60
SULLIVAN	20.58%	17.33%	61
KNOX	22.89%	17.43%	62
WORTH	20.25%	21.26%	72
HOWELL	21.29%	22.10%	79
TEXAS	20.79%	23.23%	86
MCDONALD	22.11%	24.04%	91
HICKORY	25.46%	24.46%	94
MADISON	21.70%	25.43%	102
BOLLINGER	24.06%	25.46%	103
WRIGHT	23.33%	25.58%	104
OREGON	28.57%	27.61%	119
DOUGLAS	24.94%	29.41%	125
OZARK	25.44%	29.56%	126
DENT	20.17%	31.06%	139
MONTANA			
PETROLEUM	32.77%	3.20%	2
GOLDEN VALLEY	22.42%	3.44%	3
CARTER	25.03%	4.33%	6
MCCONE	22.13%	4.44%	7
GARFIELD	22.68%	4.51%	8
PRAIRIE	31.44%	5.00%	9
WIBAUX	20.64%	17.83%	64
NEBRASKA			
BLAINE	28.14%	7.91%	22
WHEELER	20.94%	7.92%	23
NANCE	20.82%	8.65%	28
SHERMAN	20.05%	9.27%	32
LOGAN	25.53%	9.96%	34
ANTELOPE	23.15%	10.01%	35
GREELEY	29.09%	10.06%	36
BOYD	23.78%	11.74%	44
KNOX	20.23%	19.04%	68
MORRILL	22.29%	29.71%	127
NEVADA			
EUREKA	24.22%	1.71%	1
NEW MEXICO			
CATRON	22.98%	21.29%	74

STATE/COUNTY	PCT 1980 POP. BELOW POVERTY	PCT 1984 NEEDY ON FOOD STAMPS	NAT'L HUNGER COUNTY RANK
NEW MEXICO			
UNION	21.28%	24.69%	95
SIERRA	22.35%	27.15%	113
DE BACA	20.06%	28.39%	122
ROOSEVELT	27.19%	31.28%	141
NORTH CAROLINA			
WATAUGA	22.74%	20.28%	69
ASHE	22.81%	22.53%	81
CLAY	22.84%	27.60%	118
BEAUFORT	21.01%	31.89%	147
CHEROKEE	22.22%	32.02%	150
NORTH DAKOTA			
SLOPE	22.86%	6.04%	13
HETTINGER	20.92%	6.59%	15
DUNN	21.10%	9.62%	33
EMMONS	24.65%	11.30%	41
KIDDER	28.53%	11.48%	42
MCINTOSH	24.27%	11.75%	45
SHERIDAN	23.12%	14.13%	50
LOGAN	22.76%	15.32%	53
GRANT	32.36%	20.64%	71
SIOUX	32.50%	22.46%	80
BENSON	23.25%	27.09%	112
OKLAHOMA			
JOHNSTON	30.63%	28.93%	124
SOUTH DAKOTA			
HARDING	23.79%	3.76%	4
CAMPBELL	30.88%	5.00%	10
FAULK	31.20%	5.04%	11
CLARK	25.73%	5.75%	12
DOUGLAS	29.11%	6.50%	14
HANSON	31.27%	6.88%	16
HAMLIN	23.72%	7.03%	17
POTTER	21.03%	7.08%	18
SULLY	21.78%	7.31%	19
KINGSBURY	20.11%	7.56%	20
HAND	28.40%	7.72%	21
HAAKON	20.58%	8.03%	24
EDMUNDS	24.27%	8.09%	25
HUTCHINSON	23.49%	8.11%	26
BON HOMME	22.53%	8.55%	27
MCPHERSON	27.24%	8.79%	29
SPINK	20.03%	9.17%	30
MINER	32.50%	9.19%	31
AURORA	24.00%	11.07%	39
DEUEL	23.55%	11.14%	40
SANBORN	35.12%	11.51%	43
MARSHALL	22.83%	14.90%	52

STATE/COUNTY	PCT 1980 POP. BELOW POVERTY	PCT 1984 NEEDY ON FOOD STAMPS	NAT'L HUNGER COUNTY RANK
SOUTH DAKOTA			
HYDE	23.19%	16.44%	55
JERAULD	20.26%	16.55%	56
BRULE	24.71%	17.30%	59
CORSON	41.49%	27.52%	114
GREGORY	25.77%	27.54%	116
DEWEY	35.45%	30.04%	130
TENNESSEE			
PICKETT	28.47%	28.17%	121
TEXAS			
BRAZOS	22.27%	11.78%	46
MOTLEY	28.70%	13.01%	47
WILBARGER	20.22%	16.37%	54
MASON	20.47%	16.68%	57
GLASSCOCK	23.01%	17.78%	63
PARMER	21.98%	18.67%	67
HAYS	22.24%	20.44%	70
SAN SABA	24.22%	21.29%	73
MCCULLOCH	20.82%	21.30%	75
DRISCOE	25.82%	21.79%	78
GAINES	21.35%	22.82%	82
HASKELL	20.88%	22.89%	84
BREWSTER	21.88%	23.14%	85
DICKENS	26.95%	23.29%	87
JEFF DAVIS	24.89%	23.56%	88
CALDWELL	29.09%	23.62%	89
CONCHO	21.51%	24.08%	92
MENARD	28.29%	24.39%	95
LIMESTONE	23.11%	24.71%	96
COLLINGSWORTH	26.33%	24.96%	98
MITCHELL	21.38%	25.88%	106
REAL	34.22%	26.74%	110
LEON	24.38%	28.89%	123
KNOX	22.90%	30.16%	132
SWISHER	25.11%	30.55%	134
RED RIVER	25.96%	30.87%	135
WALKER	20.77%	31.00%	138
MILAN	21.99%	31.44%	144
SABINE	21.34%	31.88%	146
UTAH			
WAYNE	22.34%	11.06%	38
VIRGINIA			
CHARLES CITY	25.31%	13.71%	49
MECKLENBURG	20.73%	25.33%	101
WEST VIRGINIA			
PENDLETON	20.27%	31.32%	143

APPENDIX A

Hunger County Methodology

The classification of hunger counties in this report is based on data from two government sources: the Bureau of the Census and the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, which administers the Food Stamp Program.[1]

Identification of High Poverty Counties

All counties with more than 20% of their population living below the federal poverty level were identified. According to data from the 1980 census, 716 of the 3142 counties in the United States fall into this category. From this pool of 716 high poverty counties, hunger counties were then identified.

Two steps were involved in the identification of hunger counties from among the 716 high poverty counties. The initial step involved the determination of potential eligibles -- those who were entitled, in a given county, to food stamp assistance. The second step involved assessment of the number of people actually receiving stamps in each county. The comparison of these two figures yields a participation rate for each high poverty county in the United States. The 150 counties with the lowest food stamp participation were then identified. These 150 counties represent approximately 5% of the nation's counties.

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1. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Money Income and Poverty Status of Families and Persons in the United States: 1984," Washington, D.C., 1985; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level: 1981," Washington, D.C., 1983; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, "Food Stamp Program Statistical Summary of Operations," Washington, D.C., 1985.

Determination of Potential Food Stamp Eligibles

Food stamp eligibility is based on several criteria. Prior to revision of federal regulations in 1981, households with incomes up to 150% of poverty were potentially eligible for assistance if net household income fell below the poverty line after allowable deductions were made. In addition, potential eligibles had to meet an asset limit to qualify for stamps.

The Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act of 1981 (OBRA) lowered the cut-off point for potential eligibility to 130% of poverty. In addition, categorical exclusion of certain groups restricted food stamp eligibility among potential eligibles. Thus an eligible food stamp recipient currently is someone with household income below 130% of poverty, net income after allowable expenses below poverty, and no significant assets who does not fall into an excluded category.

In order to determine the number of eligible individuals in each of the 716 poverty counties, we began with the 1980 census. While the census does not report population below 130% of poverty, it does provide information about the population below 125% of poverty. Our calculation of potential eligibles is based on this more conservative 125% figure.

However, a striking change occurred in the number of people living below the poverty line after 1980's census enumeration was completed. The poverty population increased by approximately 20% nationwide between 1980 and 1983. It dropped in 1984 but was still 15% higher than the 1980 level.

In order to account for this increase in poverty, the 1980 census figures for each county were updated by a factor derived from data in the Census Bureau report, "Money and Poverty Status of Persons and

Households in the United States: 1984." The report indicates that between 1980 and 1984, poverty increased 29% in the Northeast, 15% in the South, 49% in the Northcentral region and 42% in the West.

This procedure, applied to each of the 716 high poverty counties, provides the denominator for assessment of food stamp participation -- the population of potential eligibles in each county. Because the most recent year for which food stamp data are available nationwide is 1984 that was the point in time to which poverty statistics were updated.

Determination of Hunger Counties

The UDSA's "Food Stamp Program Statistical Summary of Operations," provides data on food stamp distribution for each of the program's "project areas." In most parts of the United States, project areas are identical with counties. Thus, it was generally possible to compare food stamp participation to potential eligibles using participation data directly from this federal report. The most recent available "Statistical Summary" reports participation data for July, 1984. That was the date for which all information was ascertained.

In a few states project areas are defined differently, or include more than one individual county. In these instances precise county participation figures were obtained from state and/or local program officials.

There are a number of counties in which Indian tribes are permitted by federal legislation to run a commodity program which provides assistance parallel to that of food stamps. In counties with Tribal Commodity Programs the number of commodity recipients in July, 1984 was added to the number of food stamp recipients to provide the numerator for our analysis. This procedure prevented unjustified identification of a

county as a hunger county when its needy population was receiving the alternative form of aid.

The above steps were followed to define a participation figure for every high poverty county in the nation. The 150 counties with lowest participation, approximately 5% of the counties in the United States, were then defined as hunger counties for purposes of this report.

Pre-OBRA Ascertainment of Hunger Counties

Prior to passage of OBRA in 1981, potential eligibility for food stamps extended to a greater number of Americans. Households with incomes up to 150% of poverty were eligible for food assistance, as long as asset and allowable expense criteria were also met. The methodology discussed above defines eligibility in terms of the lower 130% of poverty standard currently in effect. Thus, the denominator against which current participation is measured here is smaller than the pre-OBRA denominator.

In order to assess the impact of the OBRA change, food stamp participation was also measured against the population below 150% of poverty in 1984: the income group potentially eligible for stamps prior to OBRA. As above, population figures for each county were updated to 1984 levels to provide the denominator to which actual participation levels were compared. The July, 1984 participation figures were again determined for each of the 716 potential hunger counties, but in this case they were compared to population below 150% of poverty. Based on this higher threshold for eligibility, approximately 275 counties had 1/3 or fewer potential eligibles receiving stamps. This is the participation level that characterizes the 150 hunger counties we identified using present eligibility standards. Thus, without the OBRA limitations on eligibility, approximately 10% of counties in the United States would fit the characterization of hunger counties.

Caveats: The Limitations on Available Data

Several limitations inherent in the data available for assessment of food stamp participation must be kept in mind.

First is the 198 poverty update. Regional factors used to update 1980 Census figures for population below 125% of poverty are derived from data on broad geographic regions. They may not accurately reflect the changes that occurred in the poverty population in a particular county. Potential eligibles will have been undercounted in some counties and overcounted in others. With no alternative census data available, however, the updating process was necessary to make any assessment of participation possible.

A second factor is that in identifying high poverty counties, the pool of 716 from which hunger counties were drawn, no update was applied to 1980 data. Given the variability of counties within regions, we chose to use the county-specific figures available from the 1980 census as the starting point for analysis. Since poverty increased nationally between 1980 and 1984, this produces a statistically conservative bias: our figures tend towards exclusion of counties whose poverty population may have increased up to the 20% level during the period 1980-1984.

A third limitation is the lack of data on population below 130% of poverty, the actual cut-off point for eligibility for food stamps. In order to provide the closest available estimate of eligibles the 125% census data were used. This leads to undercounting of potential eligibles.

A countervailing limitation is the lack of data on assets of potential eligibles. There are clearly individuals who appear in the eligibles denominator who are not, in fact, eligible for food stamps. A Food and Nutrition Service study released in 1981 reported that at that time approxi-

mately 25% of individuals who were income-eligible for food stamps were probably asset-ineligible.[2] However, that report was based on data from 1979, when food stamps were more readily available to the near poor. It is not clear how its findings apply to the population that meets the income criterion for eligibility today, and there is no current study that provides the basis for an up-to-date finding. This lack of data on assets leads to overcounting of potential eligibles in the denominator.

A further issue involves use of July data to characterize food stamp participation for a whole year. In general, July is a low month in the annual cycle of food stamp participation. However, since food stamp participation has consistently fallen from 1984 through the present, and since July, 1984 data was the most current data available for all areas of the nation, that month was used in completing this analysis.

Finally, there is the general issue of data quality. We have relied on census data and USDA food stamp data; the latter is of greater concern. It is likely that some errors are made by local programs in reporting to the USDA, and that the USDA makes some errors in reporting national figures. We chose a sample of counties in which to check national against state figures for participation. In general, however, we have relied on the federal participation figures for this federal program. No reason exists to believe that any errors in the data would bias the findings in a particular direction: under and overcounting are equally likely.

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2. U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, "Assets of Low Income Households: New Findings on Food Stamp Participants and Nonparticipants," Report to the Congress, January, 1981.

APPENDIX B

Hunger Counties by State: 1968, 1973, 1986

State	(with OBRA) 1986	(without OBRA) 1986	1973	1968
Alabama	1	3	3	17
Alaska	0	0	0	0
Arizona	2	3	0	1
Arkansas	6	18	28	6
California	0	0	0	0
Colorado	2	6	0	2
Connecticut	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	0
Florida	4	15	9	9
Georgia	5	22	15	50
Hawaii	0	0	0	0
Idaho	3	1	1	0
Illinois	1	2	2	2
Indiana	0	0	0	0
Iowa	2	2	0	0
Kansas	0	0	2	0
Kentucky	0	1	14	13
Louisiana	0	5	4	11
Maine	0	0	0	0
Maryland	0	0	1	1
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0
Michigan	0	1	0	0
Minnesota	5	5	2	0
Mississippi	0	3	3	38
Missouri	17	26	3	2
Montana	7	8	4	1
Nebraska	10	10	13	0
Nevada	1	1	0	0
New Hampshire	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0
New Mexico	5	10	2	7
New York	0	0	0	0
North Carolina	5	16	30	28
North Dakota	11	10	4	1
Ohio	0	0	0	0

State	(with OBRA) 1986	(without OBRA) 1986	1973	1968
Oklahoma	1	11	1	5
Oregon	0	0	0	0
Pennsylvania	0	0	0	0
Rhode Island	0	0	0	0
South Carolina	0	3	1	18
South Dakota	28	31	9	7
Tennessee	11	11	16	11
Texas	29	45	67	35
Utah	1	2	0	0
Vermont	0	0	0	0
Virginia	2	7	32	14
Washington	0	0	0	0
West Virginia	1	4	0	0
Wisconsin	0	0	0	1
Wyoming	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	150	281	263	280

Note: The 1981 Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Act (OBRA) changed federal food stamp eligibility standards. Column one (1986-OBRA) shows hunger counties under these new standards. Column two (1986-without OBRA) shows the number of hunger counties using the same food stamp eligibility criteria used in 1973 and 1968.

APPENDIX C

Hunger Counties by Federal Region

Region/State	Number of Hunger Counties
REGION I	(0)
Maine	0
Vermont	0
New Hampshire	0
Massachusetts	0
Connecticut	0
Rhode Island	0
REGION II	(0)
New York	0
New Jersey	0
REGION III	(3)
Pennsylvania	0
Delaware	0
Maryland	0
West Virginia	1
Virginia	2
REGION IV	(16)
Alabama	1
Tennessee	1
North Carolina	5
South Carolina	0
Georgia	5
Mississippi	0
Florida	4
Kentucky	0
REGION V	(6)
Ohio	0
Indiana	0
Illinois	1
Michigan	0
Wisconsin	0
Minnesota	5

REGION VI	(41)
Arkansas	6
Louisiana	0
Oklahoma	1
Texas	29
New Mexico	5
REGION VII	(29)
Kansas	0
Missouri	17
Iowa	2
Nebraska	10
REGION VIII	(49)
Colorado	2
Utah	1
Wyoming	0
Montana	7
South Dakota	28
North Dakota	11
REGION IX	(3)
Arizona	2
Nevada	1
California	0
Hawaii	0
REGION X	(3)
Idaho	3
Oregon	0
Washington	0
Alaska	0

APPENDIX D

AFDC and Food Stamp Benefits by State

The federal poverty level for a family of four is $10,609. This is the level at which it is theoretically possible for a family to obtain basic necessities and to purchase food supplies necessary to meet minimum nutritional requirements.

In no state in the nation, however, does the combined income from food stamps and AFDC (two major safety net programs) bring family income up to the poverty level.

	AFDC benefit	AFDC as a % of poverty	Food stamps benefit	Combined AFDC and food stamps Total	As % of poverty	Rank
Alabama	$147	16.6%	$264	$411	46.5%	50
Alaska	$775	70.1%	$212	$987	89.3%	1
Arizona	$282	31.9%	$256	$538	60.9%	38
Arkansas	$191	21.6%	$264	$455	51.5%	48
California	$660	74.7%	$143	$803	90.8%	3
Colorado	$420	47.5%	$215	$635	71.8%	21
Connecticut	$549	62.1%	$176	$725	82.0%	8
Delaware	$336	38.0%	$240	$576	65.2%	33
Dist. of Columbia	$366	41.4%	$231	$597	67.5%	29
Florida	$273	30.9%	$259	$532	60.2%	39
Georgia	$245	27.7%	$264	$509	57.6%	43
Hawaii	$546	53.7%	$318	$864	85.0%	9
Idaho	$344	38.9%	$238	$582	65.8%	31
Illinois	$368	41.6%	$230	$598	67.7%	28
Indiana	$316	35.7%	$246	$562	63.6%	35
Iowa	$419	47.4%	$215	$634	71.7%	22
Kansas	$396	44.8%	$222	$618	69.9%	24
Kentucky	$246	27.8%	$264	$510	57.7%	42
Louisiana	$234	26.5%	$264	$498	56.3%	44
Maine	$452	51.1%	$205	$657	74.3%	12
Maryland	$376	42.5%	$228	$604	68.3%	26
Massachusetts	$463	52.4%	$202	$665	75.2%	10
Michigan	$441	49.9%	$209	$650	73.5%	15
Minnesota	$611	69.1%	$158	$769	86.9%	5
Mississippi	$120	13.6%	$264	$384	43.4%	51
Missouri	$308	34.8%	$248	$556	62.9%	37
Montana	$425	48.1%	$213	$638	72.2%	19

	AFDC benefit	AFDC as a % of poverty	Food stamps benefit	Combined AFDC and food stamps Total	As % of poverty	Rank
Nebraska	$420	47.5%	$215	$635	71.8%	20
Nevada	$272	30.8%	$259	$531	60.1%	40
New Hampshire	$429	48.5%	$212	$641	72.5%	17
New Jersey	$443	50.1%	$208	$651	73.6%	14
New Mexico	$313	35.4%	$247	$560	63.3%	36
New York	$566	64.0%	$171	$737	83.4%	6
North Carolina	$221	25.0%	$264	$485	54.9%	45
North Dakota	$454	51.4%	$205	$659	74.5%	11
Ohio	$343	38.8%	$238	$581	65.7%	32
Oklahoma	$349	39.5%	$236	$585	66.2%	30
Oregon	$446	50.5%	$207	$653	73.9%	13
Pennsylvania	$401	45.4%	$221	$622	70.3%	23
Rhode Island	$440	49.8%	$209	$649	73.4%	16
South Carolina	$206	23.3%	$264	$470	53.2%	46
South Dakota	$371	42.0%	$230	$601	67.9%	27
Tennessee	$168	19.0%	$264	$432	48.9%	49
Texas	$201	22.7%	$264	$465	52.6%	47
Utah	$425	48.1%	$213	$638	72.2%	18
Vermont	$688	77.8%	$134	$822	93.0%	2
Virginia	$321	36.3%	$245	$566	64.0%	34
Washington	$561	63.5%	$173	$734	83.0%	7
West Virginia	$249	28.2%	$264	$513	58.0%	41
Wisconsin	$612	69.2%	$157	$769	87.0%	4
Wyoming	$390	44.1%	$224	$614	69.4%	25

AFDC benefit is as of November 1984. Food stamp benefits are as of November 1, 1984.

Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington, D.C., February, 1985.

PHYSICIAN TASK FORCE ON HUNGER IN AMERICA

Hunger has returned to America. Between 1982 and 1985, some fifteen national studies documented widespread hunger in the nation. Organizations as diverse as the U.S. Conference of Mayors, National Council of Churches, General Accounting Office, and U.S. Department of Agriculture cited the return of hunger as a serious problem in this country.

In 1985, the Harvard-based Physician Task Force on Hunger in America released the findings of a year-long investigation: Hunger in America: The Growing Epidemic (Wesleyan University Press, October, 1985). Based on research and field investigations in fourteen states, the physicians concluded that a minimum of 20,000,000 Americans experience hunger each month.

Convened at the request of the Field Foundation, the Physician Task Force on Hunger in America is chaired by Dr. J. Larry Brown of the Harvard School of Public Health. The panel of nationally prominent physicians sent teams into all regions of the nation, visiting health clinics, schools, elderly feeding programs, soup kitchens and government agencies. The doctors went into the homes of the hungry, taking dietary recalls and looking into pantries and refrigerators.

The Field Foundation sent teams of physicians into states of the nation in 1968. Their findings of unexpectedly high levels of hunger and malnutrition prompted national attention, leading to expansion of the federal food stamp program. In 1977, the Foundation sent doctors back to the same regions where they reported substantially less hunger as the result of federal nutrition efforts.

In recent years, however, federal nutrition programs have been cut sharply even as unemployment and poverty increased. The Physician Task Force in 1985 assessed how these factors converged to produce a sharp increase in hunger today, especially among high-risk populations: infants and children, pregnant women and the elderly.

During the coming year the Physician Task Force will identify several hundred counties across America where poverty is high and food stamp participation is low. Teams of doctors will be sent into selected counties to assess why this critical food program fails to reach nearly half the eligible needy. These field investigations will lead to a public report for Congress and the nation, to be released in 1986.

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